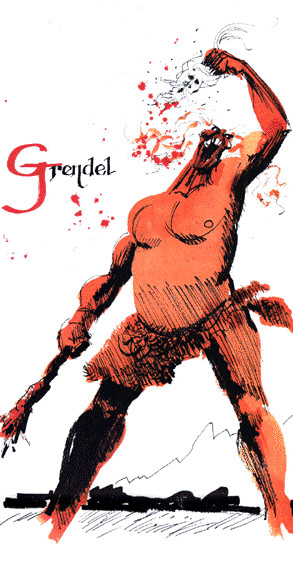
***Characters***

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| --- | --- |
| ***Aeschere:*** | He is the dear friend and chief advisor of King Hrothgar. He is the man who is killed brutally by Grendel's mother. It is his bloody head that Grendel's mother leaves sitting on the edge of a cliff as a sign of her revenge. |
| ***Beowulf:*** | "The hero of all heroes," Beowulf, Beowulf the Dane, son of Edgetho, strong and courageous, is the prince of Geats. Once he makes a vow, he stands by his word, no matter what the cost, even if it takes his life. He is reluctant to back down from battle, just so he can be there for the people who are in great need to be saved from evil. He signifies the true heroic character because he is willing to risk his life for his ideals. Beowulf defeats three gruesome monsters, two of whom are descendants of Cain. |
| ***Grendel:*** | He is a monster that is half-man and half-fiend. He is the first monster that Beowulf kills. Also he is enormous and possesses superhuman strength, which makes him undefeatable by the warriors of Denmark. He lives in the bottom of the lake not far from Heorot. Grendel is the descendant of Cain who represents evil and corruption. He has been attacking Heorot, where Denmark's warriors live, for twelve years, causing suffering and misery. |
| ***Grendel's Mother:*** | She is another monster that Beowulf kills. She is virtually undefeatable by any human. She is a descendant of Cain. She kills Aeschere as revenge for her son's death. She finally dies in an underwater battle with the hero, Beowulf. |
| ***Hygelac:*** | He is Beowulf's uncle, King of the Geats.It is to him that Beowulf wishes his treasures to be sent if anything should happen to him. |
| ***Hrothgar:*** | He is the King of Danes. He has a great deal of compassion for his warriors and his people. This man isn't afraid to hide his emotions. This is important because at the time, according to the warrior code, a man was not to show his feelings publicly. He builds a mead-hall and names it Heorot for his warriors to celebrate success. Hrothgar is a wise and admirable king to his people, but lacks strength to physically combat his and his people's enemies, as he is an aging King. |
| ***Unferth:*** | He is a courtier, jealous of Beowulf, who feels inferior to Beowulf. He doubts Beowulf's power to defeat Grendel, claiming that it is luck that has been helping Beowulf in his previous encounters. Upon learning of Grendel's defeat, Unferth is impressed by Beowulf and presents him his sword, Nailing, as a sign of reconciliation. |
| ***Wiglaf:*** | He is a warrior who aids Beowulf against the battle with the dragon. At this point, Beowulf is an old aging king. He no longer possesses the power he once had to fight Grendel and his mother. Wiglaf's relationship with Beowulf is parallel to Beowulf's relationship with King Hrothgar. |

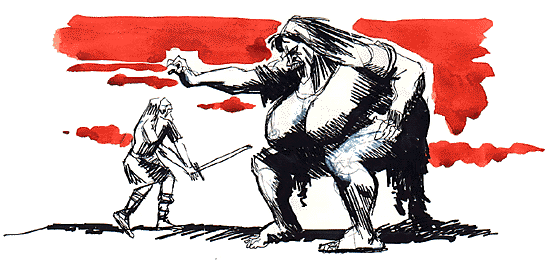
*Beowulf* begins with a history of the great Danish King Scyld (whose funeral is described in the Prologue). King [Hrothgar](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#hrothgar), Scyld's great-grandson, is well loved by his people and successful in war. He builds a lavish hall, called Heorot, to house his vast army, and when the hall is finished, the Danish warriors gather under its roof to celebrate.

[[](http://www.lnstar.com/beowulf/beowulf1.htm)](http://www.lnstar.com/beowulf/beowulf1.htm)[Grendel](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#grendel), a monster who lives at the bottom of a nearby mere, is provoked by the singing and celebrating of Hrothgar's followers. He appears at the hall late one night and kills thirty of the warriors in their sleep. For the next twelve years, the fear of Grendel's fury casts a shadow over the lives of the Danes. Hrothgar and his advisors can think of nothing to calm the monster's anger.

[[](http://www.twd.net/)](http://www.twd.net)[Beowulf](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#beowulf), prince of the Geats, hears about Hrothgar's troubles, gathers fourteen of the bravest Geat warriors, and sets sail from his home in southern Sweden. The Geats are greeted by the members of Hrothgar's court, and Beowulf boasts to the king of his previous successes as a warrior, particularly his success in fighting sea monsters. Hrothgar welcomes the arrival of the Geats, hoping that Beowulf will live up to his reputation. During the banquet that follows Beowulf's arrival, [Unferth](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#unferth), a Danish thane, voices doubt about Beowulf's past accomplishments, and Beowulf, in return, accuses Unferth of killing his brothers. Before the night ends, Hrothgar promises Beowulf great treasures if he meets with success against the monster.

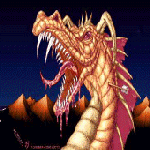
Grendel appears on the night of the Geats' arrival at Heorot. Beowulf, true to his word, wrestles the monster barehanded. He tears off the monster's arm at the shoulder, but Grendel escapes, only to die soon afterward at the bottom of his snake-infested mere. The Danish warriors, who have fled the hall in fear, return singing songs in praise of Beowulf's triumph. Hrothgar rewards Beowulf with a great store of treasures. After another banquet, the warriors of both the Geats and the Danes retire for the night.

Unknown to the warriors, however, [Grendel's mother](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#mother) is plotting revenge. She arrives at the hall when all the warriors are sleeping and carries off [Aeschere](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#aeschere), Hrothgar's chief advisor along with her son's **claw**. Beowulf offers to dive to the bottom of the lake, find the monster and destroy her. He and his men follow the monster's tracks to the cliff overlooking the lake where Grendel's mother lives. They see Aeschere's bloody head sitting on the cliff. While preparing for battle, Beowulf asks Hrothgar to protect his warriors, and to send his treasures to his uncle, King [Hygelac](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#hygelac), if he doesn't return safely.

Before Beowulf goes into the sea, Unferth offers him his sword, [[](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/sword1.jpg)](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/sword1.jpg)**Hrunting**. During the ensuing battle Grendel's mother carries Beowulf to her underwater home. After a terrible fight, Beowulf kills the monster with a magical sword, probably put there by the Al-Weilder, that he finds on the wall of her home. He also finds Grendel's dead body, cuts off the head, and returns to land, where the Geat and Danish warriors are waiting expectantly. Beowulf has now abolished the race of evil monsters.   
[](http://www.lnstar.com/beowulf/beowulf5.htm)

The warriors return to Hrothgar's court, where the Danes and Geats prepare a feast in celebration of the death of the monsters. Beowulf bids farewell to Hrothgar and tells the old king that if the Danes ever again need help he will gladly come to their assistance. Hrothgar presents Beowulf with more treasures, and they embrace, emotionally, like father and son.

The Geats sail home. After recounting the story of his battles with Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf tells King Hygelac about the feud between Denmark and their enemies, the Heatho-bards. He describes the proposed peace settlement, in which Hrothgar will give his daughter [Freawaru](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#freaw) to [Ingeld](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#ingeld), king of the Heatho-bards, but predicts that the peace will not last long. Hygelac rewards Beowulf for his bravery with land, swords, and houses.

The meeting between Hygelac and Beowulf marks the end of the first part of the poem. In the next part, Hygelac is dead, and Beowulf has been king of the Geats for fifty years. A thief steals a jeweled cup from a sleeping dragon who avenges his loss by flying through the night burning down houses, including Beowulf's own hall and throne. Beowulf goes to the cave where the dragon [](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/dragon.gif)lives, vowing to destroy it single-handedly. He's an old man now, and he is not as strong as he was when he fought Grendel. During the battle Beowulf breaks his sword against the dragon's side; the dragon, enraged, engulfs Beowulf in flames and wounds him in the neck. All of Beowulf's followers flee except [Wiglaf](http://csis.pace.edu/grendel/projf981e/char.html#wiglaf), who rushes through the flames to assist the aging warrior. Wiglaf stabs the dragon with his sword, and Beowulf, in a final act of courage, cuts the dragon in half with his knife.

Yet the damage is done. Beowulf realizes that he's dying, that he has fought his last battle. He asks Wiglaf to bring him the dragon's storehouse of treasures; seeing the jewels and gold will make him feel that the effort has been worthwhile. He instructs Wiglaf to build a tomb to be known as "Beowulf's tower" on the edge of the sea. After Beowulf dies, Wiglaf admonishes the troops who deserted their leader when he was fighting against the dragon. He tells them that they have been untrue to the standards of bravery, courage, and loyalty that Beowulf has taught.

Wiglaf sends a messenger to a nearby camp of Geat soldiers with instructions to report the outcome of the battle. Wiglaf supervises the building of the funeral pyre. In keeping with Beowulf's instructions, the dragon's treasure is buried alongside Beowulf's ashes in the tomb. The poem ends as it began -- with the funeral of a great warrior.